

**Challenging Youth**

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**An Overview of the Socio-Economic Challenges for  
Youth in Asia-Pacific**

SAMPLE

*A Work Sample  
By Christian Dohrmann*

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## PREFACE

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The present document is a regional analytical overview of the challenges that youth face in school-to-work transition and participation in society and politics in the ESCAP region. The situation of youth will be reviewed, highlighting the most common issues, and some existing good practices in the Asia-Pacific Region will be exemplified.

Countries in the ESCAP region face and share significant challenges with regard to youth issues, including skills development for employment, political inclusion of young people and civic engagement in decision-making. At the outset, it is important to recognize that the various countries have different definitions of youth, as can be seen later. These definitions may differ from the official United Nations definition of young people aged 15 to 24.

The document will lean on the Youth Section Wide Action Plan (Youth-SWAP) which has the intention to mainstream youth across the work of United Nations agencies. While Youth-SWAP identifies five thematic areas in which to advance cooperation and collaboration, the present report will focus on:

- I) Employment and Entrepreneurship,
- II) Political Inclusion and
- III) and Civic Engagement.

Within each section, the challenges that youth face in selected countries will be discussed, in addition to examples of existing good practices. The discussions will lead into the section *Summary and Recommendations*, commenting on the current situations of youth and suggesting improvements for youth policies.

The section of *Employment and Entrepreneurship* will give an overview of the current unemployment situation before it will explore the transitional difficulties and reasons which young people are facing when finishing school and looking for integration into the labour market. *Political Inclusion* will reflect on youth's perception of being considered by national authorities as well as outlining the discrepancy in political participation. *Civic Engagement* will expand on the issues of inclusion and participation in the wider civil society, with shining a light on the meaning of volunteerism and why to participate as recognized individuals.

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## CHAPTER ONE

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### *A Youthful Population*

Societies in Asia and the Pacific are in a time of transition. Leaders of societies have become aware of the youthful population which this region shelters; a population that inevitably will take over the steering wheel of today's societal engines. Despite being aware of that every generation strives to apply their approaches to integrating into society distinct to those of previous generations, established institutions tend to hold onto gridlocked mechanisms that suit current leaders and decision-makers, but not the next generation. Often there is the talk about a generational conflict - old vs. young. This time, however, it is not about playing weird music, but about approaches to integration of youth into developing societies.

Each of these ESCAP Member States has relatively youthful populations, with the 10-24 age cohort constituting from a range of 20-30 per cent of the total population respectively.<sup>1</sup> Depending on country definitions, estimations of Asia and the Pacific's youth population vary, as it can be seen in figure 1. Those varying definitions make it difficult to retrieve a clear picture of Asia and the Pacific's youth population composition.

**Figure 1: Country definition of youth and national youth policy**

Country	Definition of youth	Existing youth policy
Bangladesh	18-35	National Youth Policy (2003)
Cambodia	15-30	National Policy on Youth Development (2011)
India	15-29	National Youth Policy (2014)
Kazakhstan	14-29	National Youth Policy (2013)
Mongolia	15-24	National Programme on Youths and Adolescents Development (2006)
Pakistan	15-29	To date: Punjab province with only approved youth policy (2012), the other regions and territories are engaged in consultation and drafting processes. Nonetheless, Pakistan is a signatory of The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2006-2015
Sri Lanka	15-29	National Youth Policy (2014)
Thailand	18-25	To date: Youth Development Plan (2012-2016).

Source: youthpolicy.org

Therefore, to analyze the youth population for a common picture, and in accordance with other research that was done on youth in Asia-Pacific, this report will focus on the defined youth cohort aged 15 to 24 where possible. This youth cohort of the generation 15/24 requires special consideration as socioeconomic issues often disproportionately affect this group. The current generation of young people is the largest youth group in human history that lived on the planet. Occasionally, for the purpose of exemplifying, the report will refer to statistical data outside the defined range.

An estimated 717 million youth are living in the ESCAP region alone, constituting approximately 60 per cent of the world's youth population. Moreover, being home to 25 per cent of the world's population under the age of 10, the ESCAP region will continue housing a predominant share of young adults in the near future. In particular, India and China the world's highest number of 10 – 24 year olds. Considering such demographic trends, with the establishment of

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<sup>1</sup> See: Population Reference Bureau, 2013: The World's Youth 2013 Data Sheet

youth forums worldwide, many policymakers have the paramount importance to address the needs and challenges of young persons in order to include them into a sustainable and inclusive development plan.

### *Challenges for Youth*

It is widely understood that social exclusion produces deep and long-term damage to social, economic and political participation. Therefore, the imperative for effective national policies is the inclusion of all citizens within society. Yet the undergirding issue is that youth in the region are being frequently excluded from the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development and, thus, being denied the opportunity to contribute to the prosperity of their countries and unfold their productive potentials. It may even be argued that social exclusion causes dissatisfaction among youth which leads to social unrest. Youth exclusion is multidimensional, contextual, and includes different types of disadvantages that interplay and compound each other. In this context the following chapters will shed a light on the socio-economic and political situation in the ESCAP region.

Attention must be paid to additional factors which can lead to experiencing exclusion disproportionately among youth themselves. Gender, for once, keeps being a primary concern of bringing equality into the region and among its population. So does disability contribute to exclusion in productive opportunities and learning as much as to participating in society. Also a migration background stigmatises individuals, being confronted with xenophobia and denied access to social benefits, such as health care access.

Moreover, recent empirical research looked into the demographic issue of the *youth bulge* and underlined an association of increased social conflict and violence, especially when combined with unemployment, lack of institutional arrangements that allow for voicing grievances, low economic growths, low secondary education levels among males and other factors.<sup>2</sup> The topic of the youth bulge may put pressure on nations with large youth populations, churning fear of youth unrest – event though this may be unjustified.

In the face of those challenges, changes need to be made and policies formulated in order to reduce youth exclusion, and to ensure that young persons can fulfill their potential as well as contribute to their communities and become the leaders of a more equitable future society. Moreover, these changes need to be made with ongoing consultation with youth and youth representative to truly better understand the challenges they face. Without their involvement the goal for inclusive and sustainable development would be undermined.

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<sup>2</sup> Urdal and Hoelscher, 2009: Urban Youth Bulges and Social Disorder: An Empirical Study of Asian and Sub-Saharan African Cities, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 5110, pp17.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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### *Employment and Entrepreneurship*

The thematic area of Employment and Entrepreneurship seeks to address the challenge of labour market participation of young people and argue for greater opportunities for youth to secure decent work and income while contributing to poverty reduction, sustainable development and social inclusion.

#### *Unemployment*

The most pressing challenge that youth are currently facing is high levels of unemployment. Although the Asia-Pacific region represents the lowest regional youth unemployment rate, the youth to adult unemployment ratio is globally one of the highest ratios at 11.3 per cent, which is 3.4 times the adult unemployment rate.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Asia-Pacific region accounts for over half (51.8 per cent) of the world's unemployed youth with an approximate headcount of 38 million. Regionally, women experience higher unemployment rates, except in East and North-East Asia and the Pacific. Additionally, available data reveals a trend where working poverty is significantly higher amongst young workers compared to adults.<sup>4</sup>

The ILO's paper on 'Global employment trends for youth 2013' revealed that in Asia and the Pacific, youth-to-adult unemployment ratios are highest in South East Asia, in which youth rates were six times the adult rate at 13.7 per cent to 2.3 per cent, respectively.<sup>5</sup> North Central Asia has the highest youth unemployment rate of all the Asia-Pacific subregions of 15.5 per cent, compared to an adult rate of 3.6 per cent. In South and South-West Asia, the youth unemployment rate has reached 11.1 per cent, 3.8 times the adult rate of 2.9 per cent. At the other end of the spectrum, the youth-to-adult ratio is lowest in East and North-East Asia with a rate of 9.9 per cent, compared to the adult at 5.5 per cent.

Country level trends also reflect regional characteristics whereby some of the highest youth-to-adult unemployment ratios were observed in SEA and SSWA countries (see figure 2 below). In 2013, aside from Sri Lanka Thailand had the highest youth-to-adult unemployment ratio with a youth unemployment rate 7.8 times higher than adults. Accordingly, the lowest ratios were observed in ENEA and NCA countries, with Mongolia at 2.2.<sup>6</sup>

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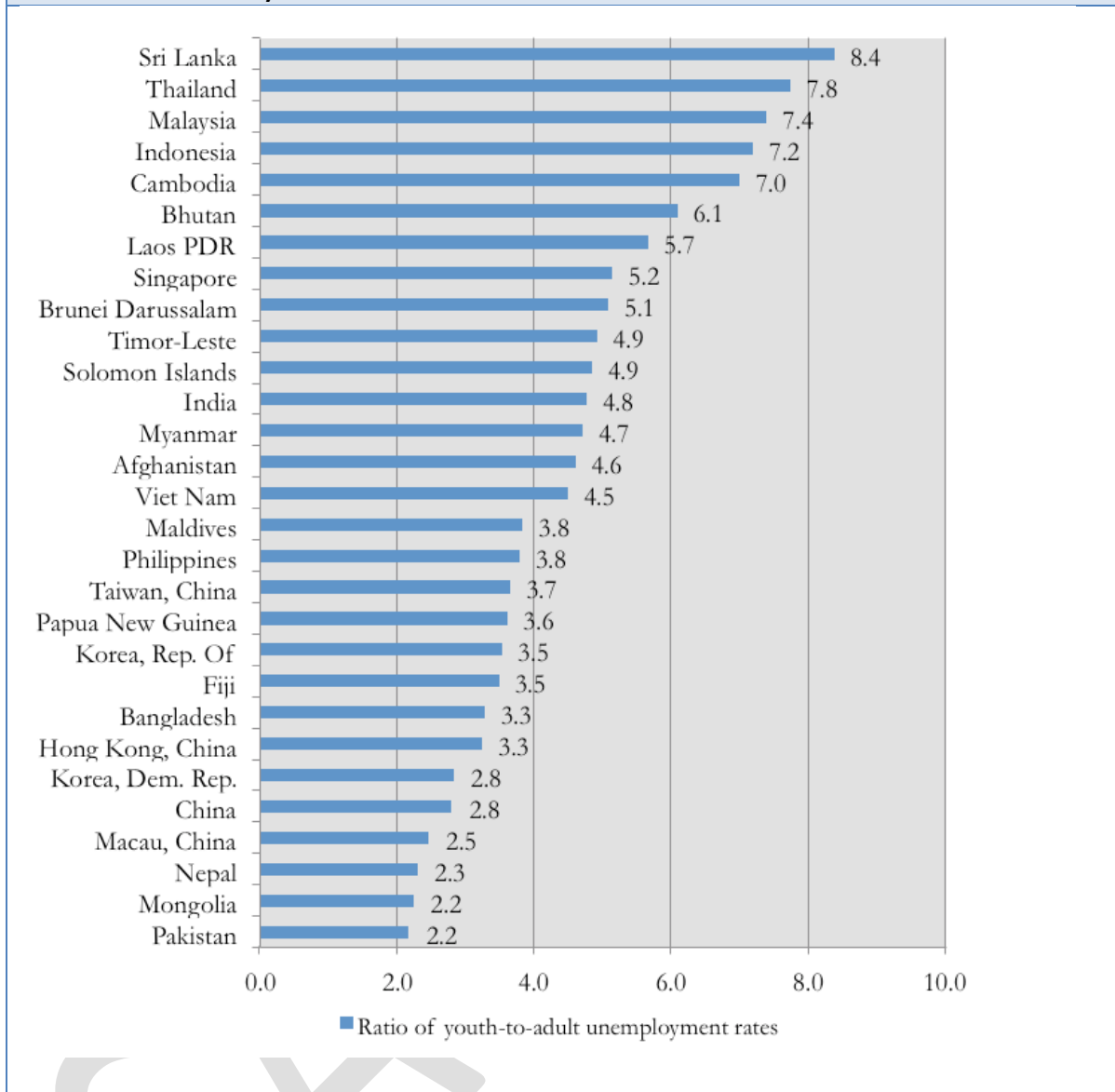
<sup>3</sup> RCM-UNDG, 2015: Switched On—Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia-Pacific.

<sup>4</sup> ILO, 2013: Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> RCM-UNDG, 2015: Switched On—Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia-Pacific.

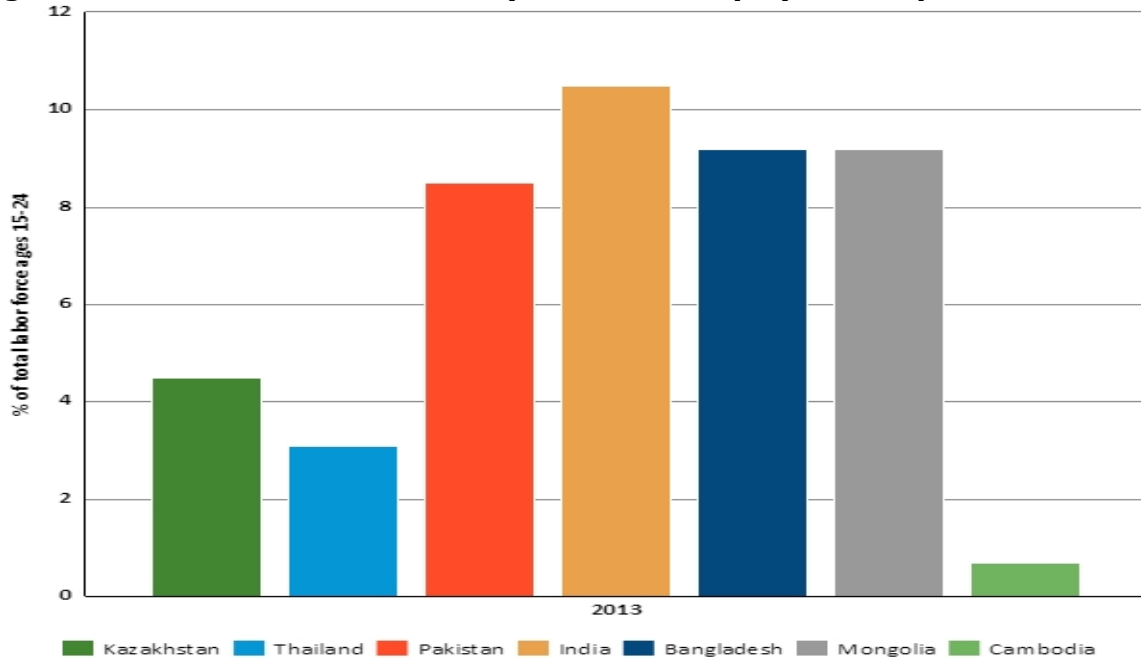
**Figure 2: Ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rates, selected Asia-Pacific countries, 2013**



Source: ILO Research Department based on ILO Trends Econometric Models.

Going into youth unemployment rates (see figure 3 below), it can be seen that the picture becomes even more diverse. Even though for example India has a lower youth-to-adult unemployment ratio than Cambodia, India displays a more than 5 times higher youth unemployment rate than Cambodia. Bangladesh, Mongolia and Pakistan also showed a relatively low youth-to-adult unemployment rate, but depict a youth unemployment rate between above 8 and 9 per cent, indicating a similar situation as in India. The situation in Thailand reverses with a high youth-to-adult unemployment ratio, while the actual youth unemployment rate is low at about 3 per cent.

**Figure 3: Youth between 15 and 24 years not in employment in per cent**



Source: Knoema.com | World Bank Data

### *Working Poverty*

Besides unemployment challenges, a pressing problem that youth face in many countries in the ESCAP region today is the lack of *decent* work. The ILO defined the term 'decent work' as productive opportunities for men and women in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. In this context, working poverty is associated with a lack of those productive opportunities which would allow males and females to earn sufficient income, with the extreme of an absence of *paid* employment opportunities.

Countries with high working poverty rates are also associated with high levels of vulnerable employment and informal employment. SSWA has one of the highest regional working poverty rates, where nearly one in four workers is counted among the working poor. In India, for example, the working poverty rate in 2010 was 33.7 per cent for youth at the US\$1.25 poverty level, compared to 28.5 per cent for adults. Thereby, it should be noted that SSWA also presents a relatively low youth unemployment rate.<sup>7</sup>

The low youth unemployment rate, however, is nothing positive as it is linked to high levels of poverty, which necessitates youth to engage in any form of productive opportunity for their survival and does not correspond to decent work. Youth from low-income households cannot afford to stay absent from the labour market and must take up any income-generating opportunity. The contrary is indicated by an increasing youth unemployment rate for a family background with incomes over the poverty rate. In those circumstances youth can afford to remain unemployed until finding a matching job opportunity.<sup>8</sup>

The trend of working poverty also exists in Cambodia, which becomes apparent from the ILO school-to-work transition survey which revealed that two thirds of working youth are classified

<sup>7</sup> ILO, 2013: Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

as 'poorly paid'. This includes informal employment, which accounts for 98.3 per cent of the share of youth employment in Cambodia.<sup>9</sup>

In other countries such as Pakistan, the youth working poverty rate was calculated 5 percentage points higher than the adult rate at 54.9 per cent in 2005.<sup>10</sup> A slowed down economy since 2007 has put a break onto the absorption of youth into employment, as the labour market cannot create enough decent job opportunities.<sup>11</sup> In Bangladesh, approximately 77.5 per cent of the total employed population (15+) and their families were living below the \$2-a-day poverty threshold in 2010.<sup>12</sup> Mongolia figures with only 42 per cent of all working youth in wage employment while only 35 per cent hold jobs in the formal economy.<sup>13</sup> In India the age group of 20-24 spikes with the highest unemployment rate, ranging at about 20 per cent; and even those young persons being active in the labour force tend to be mainly working in marginal jobs or in self-employment.<sup>14</sup> Kazakhstan depicts a slightly different picture at first glance. According to the International Monetary Fund, constant economic growth has helped reduce the youth unemployment rate in Kazakhstan since 2000. Recorded unemployment of youth rated at 3.9 per cent in 2012.<sup>15</sup> This is less than half of its level in the early 2000s, consequence of Kazakhstan's targeted governmental intervention by, e.g., an expanded vocational and training system to create employment opportunities for youth.<sup>16</sup> However, the vulnerable employment rate of all working age labour was recorded at above 30 per cent in 2012; an indicator that suggests young people to not an insignificant amount are located in vulnerable employment.<sup>17</sup>

In summary, in countries with high poverty levels and high shares of vulnerable employment, besides unemployment the youth employment challenge is typified by the problem of poor employment *quality* due to insufficient decent work.

### *Education for Employment*

While unemployment and missing decent work is of significant concern, there are cases where job opportunities are on the offer as much as there are youth to fill the position. Nonetheless, low-quality education shows to insufficiently equip the coming work force with the necessary skills to take up adequate employment.

Between 1994 and 2010, there have been significant improvements in increasing primary school enrolment. Many countries achieved the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring access to universal primary education. This has impacted as a declining number of non-literate youth from 170 million to 122 million.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, increased primary education attainment has led to a rising demand for secondary education, raising the bar to achieve universal secondary attainment.

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<sup>9</sup> Kanol, Khemarin, and Elder: 2013: Labour Market Transitions of Young Men and Women in Cambodia, ILO Work4Youth Publication Series (2).

<sup>10</sup> RCM-UNDG, 2015: Switched On—Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia-Pacific.

<sup>11</sup> Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms, 2010: Youth Strategy: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities.

<sup>12</sup> RCM-UNDG, 2015: Switched On—Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia-Pacific.

<sup>13</sup> ILO, 2013: Youth Employment Challenges in Mongolia: An Overview.

<sup>14</sup> ILO, 2013: Youth employment and Unemployment: An Indian Perspective.

<sup>15</sup> Ifutina and Shelomentseva, 2013: Some Approaches to Formation of the Balanced Labor Market of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research 16 (7): 990-995.

<sup>16</sup> IMF (2014), Country Report No. 14/243, 'Republic of Kazakhstan'.

<sup>17</sup> IMF (2014), Country Report No. 14/243, 'Republic of Kazakhstan'.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, 2013: Adult and Literacy, UIS Factsheet, September 2013 No. 26.

But besides attainment of secondary education, poor quality education is failing to properly develop skills that are relevant to tackle youth unemployment, under-employment and indecent work. Poor quality education, including professional training, denies young people the chance for social mobility and an improved quality of life, as much as it hinders society from producing skilled labourers. Additionally, a continuing gender gap in education translates into persistent gender-based inequalities later in life. The main factors that characterize gender inequity are the lack of access to gender sensitive educational infrastructure, materials and training, plus high dropout rates amongst secondary school girls.<sup>19</sup>

The transition from school to work is a key stage of development in a young person's maturation into adulthood. A difficult transition into the world of work can have a negative lasting consequence on the young individuals, their families and communities. Unfortunately, the economic and social costs of unemployment, discouragement and widespread low-quality jobs for young people undermine personal and economic growth potential.

### *Underskilled*

Aside from actual existing vacancies, the transition from school into employment is determined by whether labour skills match job requirements. Youth in the region experience unequal job access as they are often underskilled, despite having completed education or do not match the changing job market requirements.

In Cambodia, a major barrier to youth employment opportunities is early school leaving. One of the biggest problems is the dropout rate with reasons including: not wanting to be in school, having to help with household chores, having to contribute financially to the family, poor school performance, and distance to school. Consequently, those who leave school with an incomplete education or no qualification are more constrained to lower-paid, informal and vulnerable work. This is an example of youth skill mismatch to the labour market where under-education and underskilling is the issue. The situation exists where a large proportion of working youth have low levels of education which is reflected in the large share of under-educated youth in occupations requiring a higher skill base. Under-qualification in occupations in low-income countries results in low productivity growth and low capacity for economic diversification.<sup>20</sup>

In Mongolia, the youth unemployment rate is stated with more than twice the adult unemployment rate.<sup>21</sup> Additionally to youth in informal or non-wage employment, another impacting issue is the job market mismatch in skills demands. The problem effects youth who continue with higher education and still find themselves in the difficult situation of accessing the job market. In particular, since graduates, including of technical and vocational schools, are in high demand. This skills mismatch causing under-qualification is due to the fact that much of the quick-for-profit expansion in tertiary education in Mongolia has been of low cost and low quality, producing poorly prepared graduates who are unable to fulfil job requirements.<sup>22</sup> Current job requirements have shown to be critical and creative thinking skills, practical language and ICT skills and technical knowledge due to the changing economy in

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<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, 2013: Adult and Literacy, UIS Factsheet, September 2013 No. 26.

<sup>20</sup> ILO, 2013: Global employment trends for youth 2013.

<sup>21</sup> ILO, 2013: Youth Employment Challenges in Mongolia: An Overview.

<sup>22</sup> UNDP, 2013: National Human Development Report 2014: Building for Tomorrow: Including Youth in Mongolia's Development (Analytical Framework).

Mongolia.<sup>23</sup> Bringing along a title from university or vocational school - to the misfortune of young adults - does not mean bring along the crucial human capacities or technical knowhow to take up corresponding or desired employment on the evolving job market.

Despite many commendations in regard to Kazakhstan's VET (Vocational Education and Training) programme for investing in youth's education, Kazakhstan aligns with its regional partner states in issues on missing vocational skills as demanded by the industry, insufficient teaching quality due to teachers lacking relevant skills and improper information exchange between the labour market and education programmes in particular on tertiary level.<sup>24</sup>

In India, the unemployment rate among the supposedly educated youth is significantly higher compared to the adult population. Educated youth face difficulties in finding jobs that match their skills, according to a survey carried out by the Indian Government. It revealed that the unemployment rate rises for all youth with every increase of education level, and that one in three graduates between the ages of 15-29 years are unemployed.<sup>25</sup> A decline in skilled jobs in the manufacturing sector together with an increased demand for professionals in the secondary and tertiary sector has led to a situation where a large proportion of youth either do not possess the skills for new employment opportunities or are employed on a part-time temporary basis.<sup>26</sup> The casualization of jobs is pushing young persons towards the informal sectors that are characterized by insecurity and poorer working conditions.

In Pakistan, the unemployment rate of youth falls slowly with every year they age, while 15 and 16 years old young people show the highest unemployment rates ranging from 10 per cent to over 70 per cent, depending on the provincial area.<sup>27</sup> As one explanation on the higher unemployment rate of the youngest labour force can be seen the lack of conveying transferrable skills for the labour market through education.<sup>28</sup> Though this does not attribute to each and every educational institution, schooling has shown to fail to convey skills and knowledge to Pakistani youth, including leaving more than 30 per cent illiterate.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that the lack of transferrable skills among young people leads to unemployment.

Bangladesh appears in a split situation. From one perspective, the country compares similar to Kazakhstan in terms of establishing vocational education that aims at training youth in technical skills to match the labour market's demands as skilled school and university graduates were criticized to be limited.<sup>30</sup> From another perspective, an ILO labour force survey from 2010 found that 20 per cent of youth are underemployed.<sup>31</sup> The two perspectives indicate a rise in job opportunities that need adequately trained labour, yet the current trained labour could not be absorbed by the labour market. An explanation might be that Bangladesh, though a poor country, has experienced an economic upswing that allowed for a faster rise of the

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<sup>23</sup> ADB, 2011: Improving Labor Market through Higher Education Reform Project in Mongolia.

<sup>24</sup> Álvarez Galván, 2014: OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training. A Skills beyond School Review of Kazakhstan.

<sup>25</sup> Government of India Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2013: Youth Employment-Unemployment Scenario, Volume III.

<sup>26</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2014: National Youth Policy 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmad, 2010: Youth Population and the Labour Market of Pakistan: A Micro level Study. Pakistan Economic and Social Review, 8 (2), p. 183-208.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms, 2010: Youth Strategy: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities.

<sup>30</sup> ILO, 2013: Youth Employment Policy Brief: Bangladesh.

<sup>31</sup> Danish Trade Union, Ulandssekretariatet, 2014: Bangladesh Labour Market Profile.

middle class as well as an expansion of the total population while educational and economic infrastructure has only grown disproportionately.<sup>32</sup>

To mention it, the situation in Thailand appears the opposite, where the structure of the labour market and demand of low-skilled labour, most often with only higher school education, and unemployment of university graduate, reflects the imbalance between labour demands and human resources.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in the extent that young people in employment are actually over-qualified for the job they are doing, Thai society is losing their valuable skills and forfeiting stronger productivity growth that would have been achieved had these young people been employed at their appropriate level of qualification.

### *Entrepreneurship*

Youth Entrepreneurship has been heralded and encouraged as a solution to unemployment and a way to foster innovation. Given the dire situation of labour markets not being able to incorporate youth to their level of education, starting up one's own business is often not only an opportunity but a necessity. While the former means to monetize one's creative business ideas, the latter serves as a way to monetize one's labour, and in developing countries it sometimes is the only way out. However, the lack of access to credit to fund entrepreneurial ventures is a major barrier to fulfilling the potential of youth; whether in terms of opportunity or necessity.

For young persons, accessing credit through formal financial institutions is more complicated as typically they have little collateral or no proven credit worthiness.<sup>34</sup> As young people tend to have little experience and few assets, financial institutions tend to view them as too risky, even though they may only require modest amount of investment. Youth can often only turn to private moneylenders who take advantage of them and charge high interest rates with consequences leading up to violent take overs if not suicide by the victim.

**Figure 4: Key constraints to start-up finance:**<sup>35</sup>

- Lack of personal savings and resources
- Lack of securities and credibility (for debt financing)
- Lack of business experience and skills (for debt financing)
- Strict credit-scoring methodologies and regulations
- Complex documentation procedures
- Long waiting periods (time needed to decide on an application for funding)
- Lack of knowledge, understanding, awareness of start-up financing possibilities
- Unfavourable firm characteristics and industry
- Legal status/form of enterprise
- Lack of (successful) micro lending/-finance and seed funding

The lack of access to credit has been cited as another factor, hampering youth's economic potential in many countries. Amongst other reasons such as poor infrastructure, regulations

<sup>32</sup> Danish Trade Union, Ulandssekretariatet, 2014: Bangladesh Labour Market Profile.

<sup>33</sup> National Commission on the Promotion of Child and Youth Development, 2012: The National Child and Youth Development Plan B.E. 2555 - 2559 (2012 – 2016).

<sup>34</sup> UNFPA, 2014: The State of the World Population 2014: The Power of 1.8 billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future.

<sup>35</sup> Schoof, 2006: Stimulating Youth Entrepreneurship: Barriers and Incentives to Enterprise Start-ups by Young People', ILO SEED Working Paper No. 76.

and lack of education and experience; lack of access to credit is cited as a major impediment to fostering youth entrepreneurship in India.<sup>36</sup> For example, out of Pakistan's 38 million youth, it is estimated that only 15 per cent have access to micro-financial services.<sup>37</sup>

Countries in Asia and the Pacific region took and take measure to develop assistance programmes to youth entrepreneurship. The Pakistani Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry is only one social actor who recognized the need for opening up initiatives for youth to gain access to micro financial support.<sup>38</sup> The Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust in India assist in a similar way youth with gaining access to funds and mentoring business ideas by providing access to the NGO's network.<sup>39</sup> A relatively young NGO initiative has been established in Mongolia with Youth Business Mongolia which aims to strengthen start-up businesses of youth.

Without reciting all programmes that aim at assisting youth entrepreneurship, one trend moves into the foreground: Civil societies have realized the need and potential of allowing youth the handling of their own financial ventures to ensure their future as part of society which they are living in instead of living at the edge. A need from Governments, however, is to fill the credit gap with effective policies to support alternative mechanisms and institutions that assist young entrepreneurs with the capital they need to start and grow businesses.

### *Gender Perspective*

The gender gap described by the means of male and female unemployment can be interpreted ambiguously. While for some countries unemployment rates disadvantage females, in other countries males are more effected than females, and in further countries the unemployment rate is nearly equal (see figure 5 below).

### **Figure 5: Unemployed males (left) and females (right) aged 15-24 in per cent**

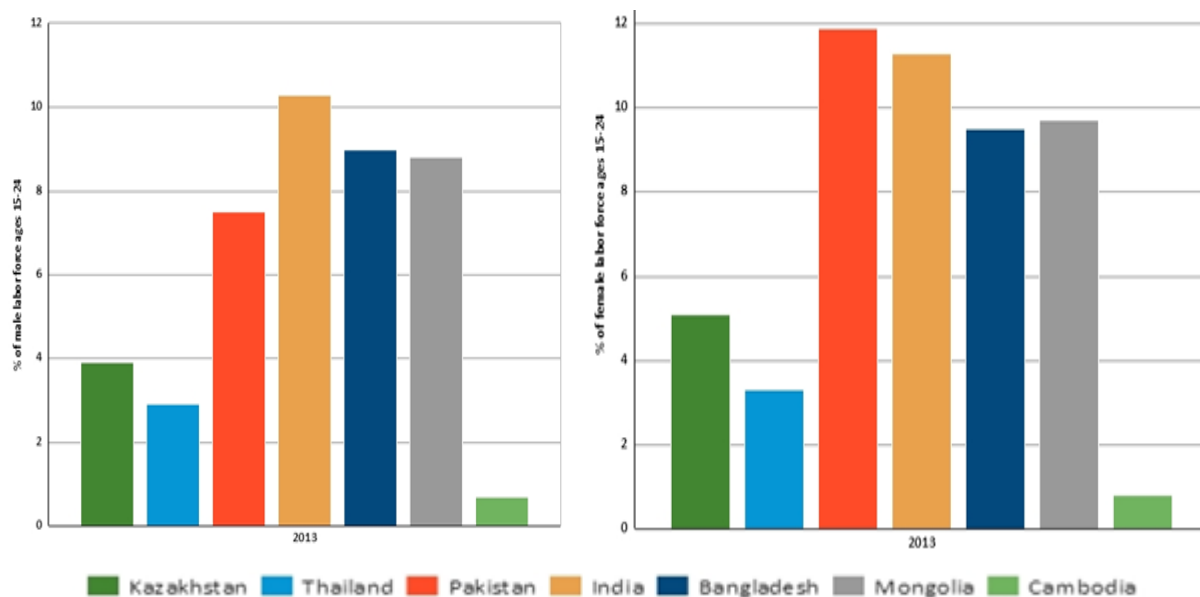
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<sup>36</sup> Singh, 2010: To Sculpture an Entrepreneur. Introduction. (no page numbering)

<sup>37</sup> Dawn, 2012: Lack of credit facilities for young entrepreneurs', 18 March 2012, [www.dawn.com/news/703746/lack-of-credit-facility-for-young-entrepreneurs](http://www.dawn.com/news/703746/lack-of-credit-facility-for-young-entrepreneurs).

<sup>38</sup> CIPE, 2013 Guide to Youth Entrepreneurship Programs for Chambers of Commerce and Business Associations; Tribune, 2013: Engaging youth: Importance of Entrepreneurship Stressed, [tribune.com.pk/story/632880/engaging-youth-importance-of-entrepreneurship-stressed/](http://tribune.com.pk/story/632880/engaging-youth-importance-of-entrepreneurship-stressed/), 18 November 2013.

<sup>39</sup> CIPE, 2013: Guide to Youth Entrepreneurship Programs for Chambers of Commerce and Business Associations.



Knoema.com | World Bank Data

Trends where females are more often unemployed are due to cultural reasons, including the lack of demand for productive work by women, and in some cases women are not even free to pursue the possibility of working outside the home. Additionally, most women face a lengthy job search before eventually settling into a job.<sup>40</sup> Females who are working are characterized by high working poverty rate. Women tend to be employed in lower skilled, lower paid jobs because of the persisting high demand for low-wage female labour in export-oriented manufacturing industry.<sup>41</sup> Wages of females achieve only 70 to 90 per cent of male's wages, entry level wages tend to be lower for females, and the pay gap remains for males and females engaged in similar work.<sup>42</sup> Knowing that, it should be wondered for how much that accounts in actual pay-out when males struggle for survival with earnings near the poverty line.

Young women, particularly those in rural areas, have especially limited access to credit.<sup>43</sup> Legal, regulatory and social barriers restrict women's ability to obtain credit such as: limited awareness amongst women regarding credit and support programmes, plus women entrepreneurs have to compete with male counterparts who have greater collateral and credit history.<sup>44</sup> This is a significant barrier on top of already high unemployment rates and vulnerable work. Access to credit can help young women establish livelihoods or create other income-generating opportunities.

### *Good practices*

#### Youth Development Service Center, Mongolia:

The center provides school-to-work transition assistance by implementing vocational training initiatives in schools of Ulaanbaatar and through the use of the internet. The purpose is to equip young persons towards the end of their school period with skills in social

<sup>40</sup> Matsumoto and Elder, 2010: 'Characterizing the school-to-work transition of young men and women: Evidence from the ILO school-to-work transition surveys', ILO Employment Working Paper No. 51.

<sup>41</sup> ILO and Asian Development Bank, 2011: Women and Labour Markets in Asia: Rebalancing for Gender Equity.

<sup>42</sup> ILO and ADB, 2011: Women and Labour markets in Asia Rebalancing for Gender Equality.

<sup>43</sup> UNFPA, 2014: The State of the World Population 2014: The Power of 1.8 billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future.

<sup>44</sup> UNESCAP, 2013: Enabling Entrepreneurship for Women's Economic Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific.

entrepreneurship, leadership and general organizational skills through workshop participation and community involvement. Higher education graduates are invited to assist in the center in form of internships, which is aimed to further offer experience in work and community engagement for youth from youth. The entire initiative by the Youth Development Service Center consists of 5 programmes each aiming at conveying distinct skills and knowledge. These programmes include the development of personal skills, community engagement skills, vocational skills, entrepreneurship skills and skills for empowering young women. Furthermore, the center encourages community youth groups in rural areas to engage in sustainable development projects.

To follow the organisation: [www.mongoliayouth.org](http://www.mongoliayouth.org)

#### World Education, Cambodia:

The private voluntary NGO World Education with an office in Cambodia engages in educating youth with life and technical skills. With representation in several countries worldwide, World Education enjoys cooperation with major international development organization, such as USAID or World Vision. In Cambodia, World Education carried out and is currently carrying out educational programmes that allow young students to improve their education curricula. As quality education has been a concern, this NGO wants to improve the transition of students from secondary school into employment. Depending on the age group, projects aim at bridging missing skills and resources for young persons. In cooperation with local microfinance institutions, World Education Cambodia facilitates rural youth to gain access to credit to start up their own business. Moreover, World Education Cambodia seeks to assist young school leavers with developing employability skills.

To follow the organisation: [cambodia.worlded.org](http://cambodia.worlded.org)

#### Club of Young Entrepreneurs, Kazakhstan:

The Club of Young Entrepreneurs functions as platform for young people between 18 and 29 in Kazakhstan to engage with representatives of the business and industry sector through presentations and discussions of innovative products, like educational games for children, sustainable energy technology or media products for businesses, on conferences organized by the club. Youth are invited to present their own ideas as well as encouraged to join presentations from the industry. Additionally, as in other programmes of entrepreneurship, youth interested in opening their own venture can obtain help through a mentoring programme with advice and assistance from business owners and managers.

For more information on the club: [most.com.kz](http://most.com.kz)

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## CHAPTER THREE

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### *Political Inclusion*

The contribution of youth is essential for an inclusive and sustainable designing of the future. In such a way the opportunity for progress of our society is underpinned by the capacity to consult and listen to youth in political decision-making processes. It must be highlighted that youth should be recognized as agents of change. Past experience has shown that the exclusion of youth from political processes can fuel frustration and which can manifest in protest movements as a means of expressing social and political grievances. Political inclusion of youth is essential for the stability as well as positive progress of a society that upholds the rights of all.

### *The Call for Consideration*

In recent years youth-led protests demonstrate the call for consideration to directly address youth related issues. Youth are demanding more equitable and forward-looking opportunities to participate in society and are standing up against political exclusion. Protests in this regard would become unnecessary, according to young people's own opinion, as by being politically considered and included would allow for negotiations instead of churning oppositions.

Youth in Asia-Pacific are yet to become equal participants in political processes compared to older cohorts and, thus, are not fulfilling their potential role as full democratic citizens. The issue of youth inclusion in political processes needs to be tackled, as without full participation of all citizens the legitimacy and strength of democratic decision-making is undermined. Youth being affected by unemployment, extreme poverty and social exclusion explains why young men and women are increasingly disillusioned with political authorities that disconsiders them from policy decisions. Hence, it is no surprise that the current generation 15/24 refrains from traditional politics.

A general indicator that youth tend to disassociate with traditional politics is their absence from participation in traditional elections to not an insignificant amount, as seen in figure 6 below. This indication found further concern in recent elections Kazakhstan and Mongolia where youth's engagement in elections remained lower than expected.

In Pakistan the youth cohort played a large role, with an estimated 25 million registered voters between 18 and 29 years. As a numerous voter count, Pakistani youth were accounted for slightly more than 30 per cent of the electorate in 2013.<sup>45</sup> A large number were first time voters who are affected by issues such as unemployment, which is why they took an interest in influencing the political sphere of Pakistan.<sup>46</sup> Elections in Cambodia in 2013 saw a similar voter turnout of participants in the age group of 18-30 who constituted a share of 36.5 per cent.<sup>47</sup> Looking at the Indian 2014 elections, in the states with relatively high young voter compositions witnessed an increase in overall voter turnout, indicating an increase in young

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<sup>45</sup> British Council Pakistan (2013) 'Next Generation Goes to the Ballot Box'.

<sup>46</sup> Rizvi, F.H (2013) 'Pakistani youth's 'decision making' in the 2013 elections'

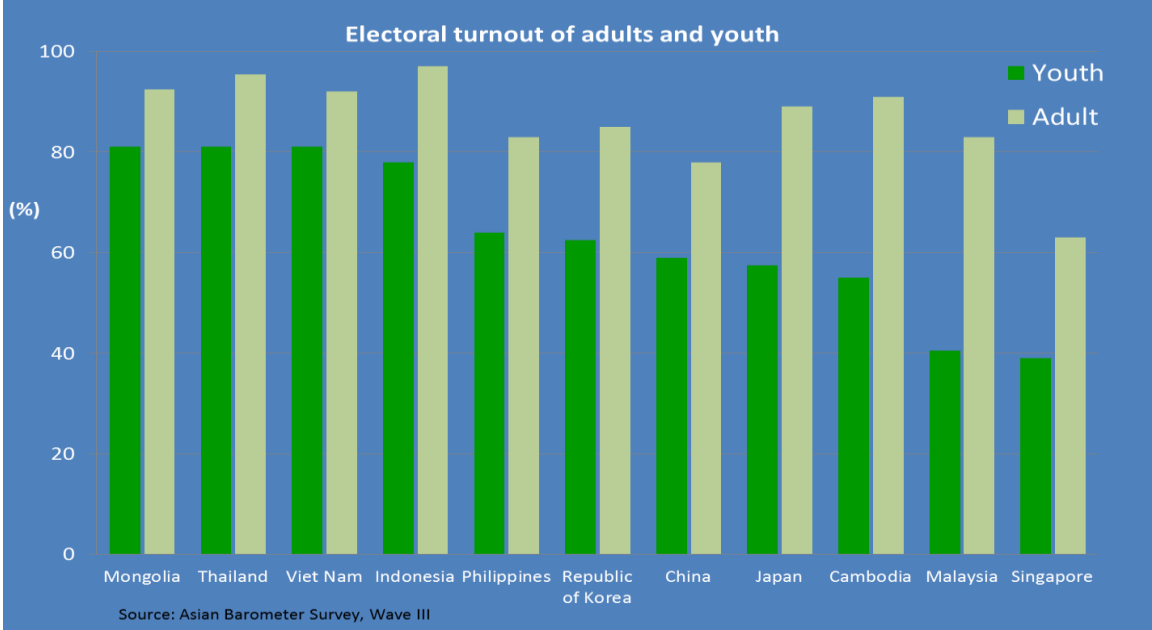
<http://www.youthpolicy.org/participation/2013/pakistani-youths-decision-making-in-the-2013-elections/>.

<sup>47</sup> Oaten, James (2014) 'Young activists take to the streets ahead of the Cambodian elections',

[www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-22/an-cambodian-spring-feature/4834450](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-22/an-cambodian-spring-feature/4834450), ABC News, 10 July 2014.

voter participation, which led to reaching the highest ever recorded total population participation of 64 per cent.<sup>48</sup> Mongolia showed a different image. Elections in 2013 experienced its lowest ever turnout, although it still accumulated to, with India comparable, 65 per cent. Analyses pointed to a politically unengaged youth demographic who express a lack of interest in being politically informed and active.<sup>49</sup> Also in Kazakhstan, there is low level of participation in elections amongst youth, which has been explained by a lack of political knowledge and culture.<sup>50</sup> In the case of Bangladesh’s elections in January 2014, overall turnout was low, at 20 per cent, and not just particularly amongst youth, as they were marred with violence and corruption.

**Figure 6: Electoral turnout of adults and youth in selected countries in Asia-Pacific**



Source: Asian Barometer Survey, Wave III

*Political Disengagement*

Often a barrier to political engagement, reflected by a feeling of disillusionment, is the lack of trust of political institutions amongst youth. This can be trust in national institutions, public officials and even in the democratic process itself.

Although youth voter turnout is an indicator of participation in formal political institutions, it may not necessarily measure interest or engagement in politics. As explained earlier in regard to social exclusion, interpreting missing participation, for once, can be the result of exclusion against the person’s will. But it can also be chosen disinterest and must not account for exclusion at all. In fact, Youth have shown to be active for political causes. They are engaging in non-electoral participation such as lobbying or activism as much as older cohorts.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the Asian Barometer Survey stated 49 per cent of Youth in East and South East

<sup>48</sup> Jain, B. (2014) ‘Highest ever turnout recorded in 2014 polls, government spending doubled since 2009’, *The Times of India*, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2014.  
<sup>49</sup> Election Guide (2013) ‘Election Watch: Mongolia’ <http://www.electionguide.org/digest/post/11014/>.  
<sup>50</sup> Rystina, I. (2012) ‘Pedagogical Principles of Forming the Political Culture of Kazakhstan Youth’, *World Applied Science Journal*, 20(Special Issue of Pedagogy and Psychology): p.29-34  
<sup>51</sup> UNDP (2014) ‘Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South East Asia: Exploring political attitudes of East and South East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer Survey’

Asia as being interested in political development and 61 per cent as following the news on politics.<sup>52</sup> Emphasising on inclusion of Youth into voting mechanisms, therefore, may not be the solution of mitigating exclusion from political engagement.

The complex picture of youth's political engagement was revealed regarding the Pakistani 2013 elections, as despite the high youth turnout, a survey published by the British Council Pakistan before the elections demonstrated that only 29 per cent of youth saw democracy as the best system of government in Pakistan.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, 38 per cent viewed democracy as an unacceptable model of governance and amongst those respondents some of whom supporting Islamic Shariah law. Similar findings were reported in a UNDEF evaluation report on strengthening democracy in Pakistan.<sup>54</sup> The report highlighted a lack of trust in the political system which youth thought was inequitable and not catering to their needs. Another reason that perpetuated youths' lack of trust of the political system was misinformation about the concept of democracy which some perceived as part of a Western agenda to change Pakistani society. The report mentioned that often youth trust military and education institutes more than the police or local or national governments and the courts.

In either case, whether youth are excluded from political decision-making or its outcome, there is an auxiliary factor which provokes disillusionment and in consequence chosen exclusion from political institutions. With a glance at Sri Lanka, youth previously expressed low levels of trust in public institutions due to perceptions of corruption.<sup>55</sup> For example, in 2013 37 per cent of youth identified corruption as the main barrier to political engagement, 8 per cent highlighted violence and crime, and 10 per cent named the restriction to speak up. Disillusionment with politics was stated with 89 per cent of youth indicating low trust in political parties.<sup>56</sup> Similar findings were made in Pakistan in 2012 where 71 per cent of Youth expressed unfavourable opinions of the elected Government.<sup>57</sup> A UNDEF evaluation report on democracy in Pakistan further underlined the lack of trust in the political system.<sup>58</sup>

The UNDP political attitudes survey revealed that youth, especially urban youth with higher educational attainment, tended to be even more critical than their rural and less educated counterparts as well as older citizens.<sup>59</sup> In terms of approval rates, control of corruption and government responsiveness ranked lowest amongst all aspects of governance. Responses from the survey demonstrated that with the example of Thailand youth also expressed relatively lower trust in the executive and legislature, especially compared with other less pluralistic societies. Overall, the survey revealed that out of the countries studied in East and South East Asia, youth who live in more pluralistic societies, where freedom of expression is better protected by legal frameworks, express lower levels of trust in political and in particular electoral institutions.

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<sup>52</sup> UNDP 2014 Youth-n-Democratic-Citizenship-East-n-SE-Asia [www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/democratic\\_governance/RBAP-DG-2014-Youth-n-Democratic-Citizenship-East-n-SE-Asia.pdf](http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/democratic_governance/RBAP-DG-2014-Youth-n-Democratic-Citizenship-East-n-SE-Asia.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Ashraf, S and Sowula, T. (2013) 'Next generation in Pakistan pessimistic' <http://www.britishcouncil.org/blog/next-generation-pakistan-pessimistic>.

<sup>54</sup> UDF-PAK-09-329 (2014) 'Youth Action for Democracy (YAD) – Strengthening Democracy by Empowering Youth in Pakistan'.

<sup>55</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2014). *Youth and Development: Towards a More Inclusive Future*, Colombo: UNDP. (Available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/youth-and-development-towards-more-inclusive-future>)

<sup>56</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2014). *Youth and Development: Towards a More Inclusive Future*, Colombo: UNDP. (Available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/youth-and-development-towards-more-inclusive-future>)

<sup>57</sup> British Council Pakistan (2013). *Next Generation goes to the Ballot Box 2013*, British Council. (Available at [www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/next\\_generation\\_goes\\_to\\_the\\_ballot\\_box.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/next_generation_goes_to_the_ballot_box.pdf))

<sup>58</sup> UDF-PAK-09-329 (2014) 'Youth Action for Democracy (YAD) – Strengthening Democracy by Empowering Youth in Pakistan'.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

Lack of trust in the political system (in national institutions, in public officials and in the democratic process itself) is as much a result as it is a cause of political exclusion of youth. Lack of trust stemming from corruption is a barrier to political engagement in general, and is reflected by a feeling of disillusionment.

### *Information and Communication Technology*

If we consider that youth have shown to be quite active in protests, we receive a mixed picture in terms of political engagement. The Asia-Pacific region has experienced more than 120 protests since 2006.<sup>60</sup> Although the youth voter turnout is an indicator of participation in formal political institutions, it may not necessarily measure interest and engagement in politics. The UNDP survey on Youth and Democratic Citizenship in South and South East Asia concluded that contrary to popular perceptions, youth in these parts of the region are not politically indifferent. The survey revealed that youth are less likely to participate in politics through formal channels such as voting and electoral campaigns. However, they are engaging in non-electoral participation such as lobbying or activism as much as older cohorts.<sup>61</sup> The discrepancy of political interest versus political visibility may stem from outdated approaches to political participation and decision-making. It may be time to adapt to youth, instead of forcing the new generation into old-fashioned if not rigid participation models.

Despite remaining barriers, youth are increasingly becoming powerful agents of change with frequent and outstanding examples of young people who are making innovative and substantial contributions to their communities and society at large – just not always by traditional means. Their youth in itself is an advantage when it comes to innovation and adopting new technologies. The spread of ICT has enabled young people to be a more globalized group which becomes increasingly aware and influenced by the wider world around them.

Providing *effective* channels for engagement between governments and young people are needed. So far, few mechanisms exist for youth to provide inputs to the government. A potentially effective channel that has yet to be much explored within national youth policies is young people's use of ICTs for political engagement. Social movements and political protests are clear examples in which there was high youth participation whose organization and mobilization was facilitated by the use of ICTs. Given the increasing penetration of such technologies in all social life and particularly amongst youth ICT networks are facilitating an enhanced capacity for dialogue exchange between youth. This is an opportunity for governments, who have yet to capitalize on ICTs to utilize its functionalities to engage and include youth in the political sphere.

Youth, however, has adapted to technology for information and communication. Where the Internet is accessible, social media like Facebook or Twitter is valued for its fast response and uncensored information. As not all youth can participate in political activities due to a variety of living circumstances, making use of ICT has enabled youth to engage online; a place where they can express their opinions, share and discuss information, and thus become politically engaged.

Notably, youth can be more productive as they embrace new ideas, knowledge, innovation and technologies faster than the older generation. The introduction of computer technology,

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<sup>60</sup> TWG

<sup>61</sup> UNDP (2014) 'Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South East Asia: Exploring political attitudes of East and South East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer Survey'

social networking over the internet or mobile technology has hardly brought any change in many public sector organizations, which still rely on old management for day to operations. Introduction of computer has only created new posts of computer operators in many government offices while officials are reluctant to use new technologies themselves. On the other hand, private sector companies especially in the IT, banking and finance, and some other services sector are tapping this potential in youth and have become leaders in growth.<sup>62</sup>

### *Gender disparity*

Gender remains a significant cleavage in political participation in the Asia-Pacific region. Young women are significantly less represented in formal political institutions. Barriers stem from cultural stereotypes and gender prejudices, reducing females' capabilities to the household. Family-controlled governments also do not contribute to promoting female participation in political decision-making even when the current leader is a woman. This is due to being overshadowed by being associated with the ruling family.<sup>63</sup> There is an absence of encouragement from families for young women to get involved in politics, in addition to a lack of education and access to information, all together resulting in an environment that is not conducive to young women taking active part in politics.

Much remains to be done in terms of addressing the imbalances in order to make political engagement relevant, accessible and empowering to young women. In Pakistan, where young women face high levels of exclusion such as lower levels of education and being physically excluded to the private domain of the home, political engagement is low. Some women may be registered to vote without even knowing due to Pakistan's computerized electoral roll.<sup>64</sup> Although turnout of women was unprecedented in the May 2013 general elections, with 40 per cent of all votes made up by women, serious cultural barriers remain. In many districts men sign an agreement not to let women vote.<sup>65</sup>

In a survey carried out on women's political representation and participation in local governance in Cambodia, responses revealed consensus that despite the difficulties of women and young people becoming involved in politics, the importance of a balanced leadership in which all voices were heard.<sup>66</sup> An issue remains of women's lack of motivation to get involved in politics, which can be explained by a feeling that politics is irrelevant to their concerns. This is related to the fact that politics is perceived as an unapproachable arena dominated by an older, male generation.

An approach by the Indian Upper House in 2010 to reserve 33 per cent of parliamentary seats for women begs the question why 33 per cent when a) half of all voters are female and b) 33 per cent only visualises gender based inequality even further.<sup>67</sup>

### *Good practices*

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<sup>62</sup> Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms (2010) 'Youth Strategy: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities'.

<sup>63</sup> True, J., George, N., Niner, S. and Parashar, S. (2014) Women's Political Participation in Asia and the Pacific

<sup>64</sup> British Council Pakistan (2013) 'Next Generation Goes to the Ballot Box'

<sup>65</sup> UN Women (2013) 'Sharp increase of women voters in Pakistan's 2013 elections'

<sup>66</sup> Mehrvar, M. (2013) 'Case study: young women's political representation and participation in local governance in Cambodia', Phnom Penh: *Committee to promote women in politics*

<sup>67</sup> True, J., George, N., Niner, S. and Parashar, S. (2014) Women's Political Participation in Asia and the Pacific

### Educating Young Voters, India:

The Election Commission of India (ECI) drove a large campaign called Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme to push for voter participation in the general elections. In the first of its kind the ECI, with the collaboration of UNDP India developed a videogame entitled "Get! Set! Vote!" amongst a series of edutainment materials on voter awareness and education. The materials, although created to engage citizens of all age group to learn about democracy and the electoral process, were addressed to targeted populations including youth. Further activities included setting up a "young voters festival" as well as a programme called Youth United for Voter Awareness. Since the launch of SVEEP, the ECI has recorded consistent increase in turnout at all elections since 2009, and increased turnout of women in the six states for the first time in their history. In terms of enrolment, the ECI has noted significant progress in bridging the gap in the newly eligible youth category thanks to SVEEP's targeted focus on this age cohort, with an increase of around 20 per cent of youth voter registration<sup>68</sup>. SVEEP demonstrated the success of innovative and targeted education efforts to improve voter awareness.

For all the programme details: [eci.nic.in/eci\\_main1/sveep.aspx](http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/sveep.aspx)

### Strengthening Youth Inclusion through Education, Mongolia:

The Youth Empowerment through Civic Education project, initiated by UNDP and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, has developed recommendations for revising civic education curricula to better appeal to youth, trained young journalists, and set up a Facebook group called 'DemoCrazy'. The overall aim of the project which ran from 2012 until 2014 was to improve democratic participation of youth by the means of strengthening knowledge and skills in democratic decision-making. The project involved reviewing the current education curricula and trained teachers on passing down relevant knowledge. Besides, social media tools found application to encourage dialogue between policy makers and youth on community life and engage youth-led groups in discussion on peace, freedom, justice, respect for human rights and commitment to development.

To find out more about this programme: [www.democrazy.mn](http://www.democrazy.mn)

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<sup>68</sup> Election Commission of India (2014) 'Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)'

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## CHAPTER FOUR

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### *Civic engagement*

Nurturing civic engagement in society is an investment into societal cohesion, and reduces risks of delinquencies and crime by expanding on young people's human and social capital. The theoretical argument behind this concept is that a participant in a social institution, who feels attached to that institution, is likely to uphold the values and behaviours associated to that same institution.<sup>69</sup> Through civic engagement young persons can acquire human and social capital by exercising citizenship, developing life skills and enhancing employability. Civic engagement exercised by youth positively impacts on communities with providing social services to support community development needs. At risk or excluded young people can become re-engaged in society through these types of activities, reducing the risk of youth violence.<sup>70</sup> Fortunately, there is increasing recognition among governments, policymakers and enthusiasm from young people themselves about civic engagement as one of the key components for positive youth development and successful transition to adulthood.<sup>71</sup>

### *Youth exclusion from decision-making*

Civil organizations, as the case with labour unions, neighbourhood watches, sports clubs, environmental initiatives and cultural societies of the Arts, are all social institutions that provide the means to engage with society. Thereby, they convey functional knowledge and skills beyond classical class room-based education and tend to teach trust and social understanding for cooperation across social types and statuses.<sup>72</sup> Civic engagement is a key component to increase human and social capital through interweaving young people with productive and meaningful associations that impact on their lives and connect them to their society.

However, cultural barriers of perception still hinder youth in engaging in civic activities. Similarly to political participation, a large obstacle for youth is that they are often not afforded the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes because of perceptions related to their status of being *young*. This is problematic due to the lost potential of youth contribution which ultimately may stifle innovation and growth. In Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India a similar issue prevails in that youth are deemed inexperienced and not worth being listened to.<sup>73</sup>

In Cambodia, the voice of youth is often not incorporated into planning processes and young people are rarely called upon to participate in village meetings. This is partly owing to the hierarchical nature of Cambodian society where adults' opinions are respected over younger

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<sup>69</sup> Hirschi (1969) In Community Context, Social Integration into Family, and Youth Violence Chris Knoester and Dana L. Haynie Journal of Marriage and Family Vol. 67, No. 3 (Aug., 2005), pp. 767-780

<sup>70</sup> UNICEF (2008) 'Young People's Civic Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific'

<sup>71</sup> UNICEF (2008) 'Young People's Civic Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific'

<sup>72</sup> J Health Popul Nutr. 2009: 536–544. Civil Society, Health, and Social Exclusion in Bangladesh, Anna T Schurmann corresponding and Simeen Mahmud; Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol. 26 – No. 1, 2003 Nordic Political Science Association, Participation and Social Capital Formation: Norway in a Comparative Perspective1, Dag Wollebæk and Per Selle

<sup>73</sup> Innovations in Civic Participation (2010) 'Youth Development through Civic Engagement: Mapping Assets in South Asia'.

persons on the basis of age and experience.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, schools in Cambodia often do not adequately prepare students as discussed earlier, which weakens one of the main catalysers for civic education. So are financial constraints another obstacle for civic engagement for Cambodian youth because they have limited time after meeting the demands of their family. The political context of Cambodia also acts as a deterrent to civic engagement because people in power often use fear tactics to dissuade youth from taking part in activism.<sup>75</sup>

Also in Pakistan, the government's historical stance as well as a traditional view of young persons has impeded youth civic engagement. In the past, political repression in Pakistan has clamped down on civil society organizations and civic activists in which many young persons were involved. Many forms of youth civic engagement have faced resistance and consequently discouraged youth participation; notably, the ban on student unions imposed in 1984. Although the ban has since been lifted in 2008, youth civic engagement remains low because of lack of opportunities for participation as well as the fairly negative traditional conception that young people would be inexperienced and have yet to prove their value.<sup>76</sup>

In Bangladesh, where youth civic engagement and voluntary service is already well developed in the area of disaster relief, young persons feel that it is difficult to have a sustained involvement in other voluntary services. The reason for this was cited due to the difficulty of gaining the confidence of adults to believe that young people can make a difference, and, therefore, there is lack of engagement on the part of the government and society as a whole to engage young people in civic responsibilities.<sup>77</sup> This situation is similarly in India where the important role of young people have played in times of crisis but there is less importance given to the role that young people can play in societal development.<sup>78</sup>

If the obstacle which youth are facing is the opportunity to participate in every level of decision-making, then a key civic engagement issue is the question whether or not youth have the ability to at least *influence* decision-makers. A youth opinion poll carried out by the Asia-Pacific Youth Poll in 2014, which collected over 2000 responses from countries in the Asian and Pacific region including Thailand and Cambodia, shed light on this issue (see figure 8). In this poll, the results show the issue of decision-makers not listening to young people, despite the acknowledgement of governments providing at least in some cases means for young people's input.

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<sup>74</sup> United Nations Country Team (2009) 'Situation Analysis of Youth in Cambodia'

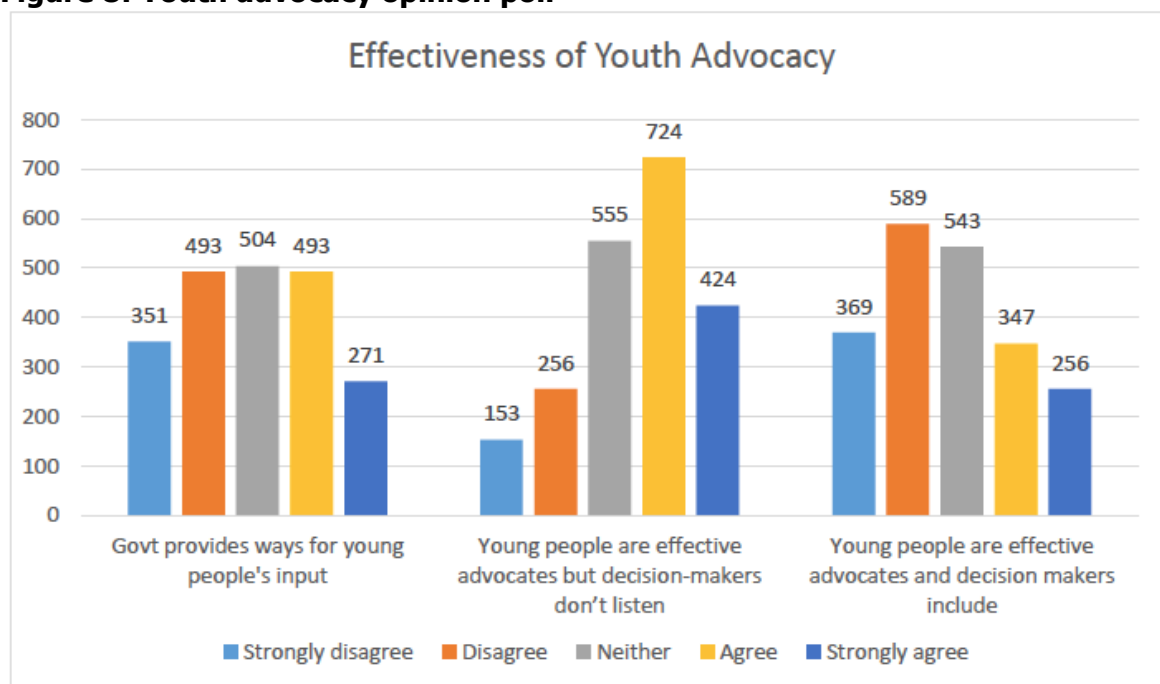
<sup>75</sup> Pact Cambodia (2008) 'Youth in Cambodia: A Force for Change'

<sup>76</sup> Innovations in Civic Participation (2010) 'Youth Development through Civic Engagement: Mapping Assets in South Asia'.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

**Figure 8: Youth advocacy opinion poll**



Source: Asia-Pacific Youth Poll (2014)

### *Volunteerism*

Volunteerism is a means for civic engagement. Like other forms of civic participation, volunteerism is mutually beneficial to both youth volunteers and the community by building social capital and creating relations. Volunteering involves committing time to participate in social and community-based activities usually without remuneration. Empirical research has identified positive outcomes that are linked to volunteerism such as voluntary and political activity in later life, reduction of problem behaviours, higher wellbeing, higher levels of citizenship and a greater sense of community.<sup>79</sup> However, building the role that youth play in volunteering should not be seen as an alternative to relieve the role of the state in providing such social protection services.

With perspective on developing countries, refrainment from civic engagement is a common scenario which can be attributed to the majority of the population living in poverty. A study on social exclusion in Bangladesh showed that poor people tend to work over long hours and have little time for participating in activities that do not directly contribute to their livelihood.<sup>80</sup> This affects young people as they, belonging to households with little income, are often required to support their parents' income, with the more dramatic results of falling out of the education system entirely. Hence, participation in extra-curricular and non-employment related activities by young people is unlikely. Secondly, low levels of education – may it be by early school leaving or low education quality - also limit individual capacity and affect personal confidence which again reduces participation in activities that appear to require specific knowledge and skills in order to contribute to that organization.<sup>81</sup> A spiral.

<sup>79</sup> Bennett, M. and Parameshwaran, M. (2013) 'What factors predict volunteering amongst youth in the UK?' *Third Sector Research Centre Briefing Paper No. 102*

<sup>80</sup> J Health Popul Nutr. 2009: 536–544. Civil Society, Health, and Social Exclusion in Bangladesh, Anna T Schurmann corresponding and Simeen Mahmud

<sup>81</sup> J Health Popul Nutr. 2009: 536–544. Civil Society, Health, and Social Exclusion in Bangladesh, Anna T Schurmann corresponding and Simeen Mahmud

Income levels and unemployment are likely to influence the amount of time a young person can dedicate to volunteering.<sup>82</sup> In Thailand, a study highlighted pressure on young persons to focus on their studies and career instead of committing to volunteer activities, and the difficulty of balancing time between these priorities and civic participation.<sup>83</sup> In response, many Thai youth utilize social media as a means for expressing themselves and engaging in civil society.<sup>84</sup> Just like it has been discussed with political participation, ICTs offer advantages to traditional civic engagement because users can engage in discussion and projects anywhere they have internet, including their mobile phones.

In contrast, according to a study in Kazakhstan, the main reason for not participating in public activities such as visiting children's home or helping the elderly is due to a lack of information about the events.<sup>85</sup> Therefore the lack of engagement by the youth is not indicative of apathy but could be related to the absence of available information. In addition, there are few civic associations for young people, which results in low levels of social and civic engagement. Those who are engaged in voluntary service are predominantly found in universities, with a remaining low figure of student volunteers of 30%.<sup>86</sup>

### *Sustainable Development*

An important area of youth civic engagement is related to environmentally sustainable development, as it has direct implications for youth's well-being now and in the future. It is essential to strengthen the participation of youth in the protection and preservation of the environment and sustainability practices, yet education and training on the environment needs to be reinforced to harness youth's commitment here. Results from the Asia-Pacific Youth Poll 2014 revealed that in fact over half of the respondents had no interest in environmental activities and over half also feel that youth's ability to contribute to environmental activities is limited by skills and financial resources (see figure 9). At the same time hopeful examples from the region exist, including the Central Asian Youth Environmental Network, which is particularly active in Kazakhstan in promoting young people to take action to prevent environmental degradation.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Innovations in Civic Participation (2010) 'Youth Development through Civic Engagement: Mapping Assets in South Asia'.

<sup>83</sup> UNICEF (2008) 'Young People's Civic Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific'

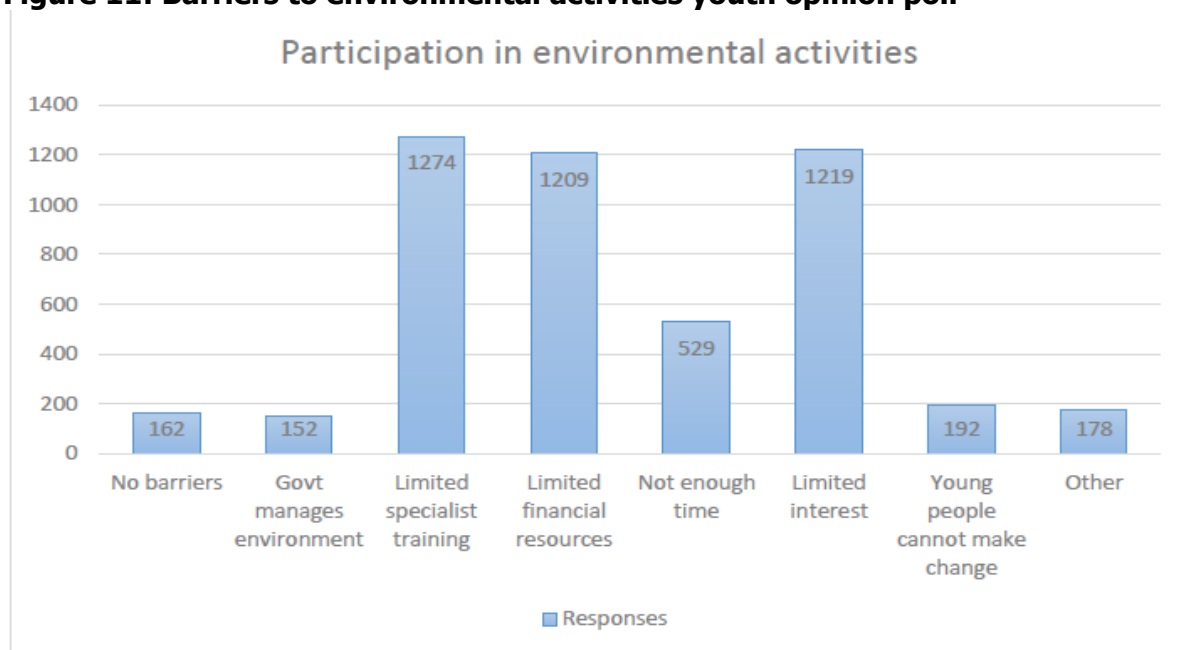
<sup>84</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, (2012) 'Youth Future Agents of Change or Guardians of Establishment?'

<sup>85</sup> Assylbekova, A. (2015) 'Social Engagement of Kazakh Students' *Review of European Studies*, 7.6, p.61

<sup>86</sup> Assylbekova, A. (2015) 'Social Engagement of Kazakh Students' *Review of European Studies*, 7.6, p.61

<sup>87</sup> Central Asian Youth Environmental Network, <http://cayen.org/>, accessed: 14 August 2015

**Figure 11: Barriers to environmental activities youth opinion poll**



Source: Asia Pacific Youth Poll (2014)

### *Gender Perspective*

Based on a human rights perspective everyone is entitled to the same rights regardless of their gender and, thus, this also applies to the access to civic participation. Unfortunately, barriers to civic participation for women still exist in different places throughout the region. In Pakistan gender deters access to participation in civic engagement due to persisting social taboos and female discrimination.<sup>88</sup> To counter this, organizations such as Youth Engagement Services (YES) Network Pakistan have taken important steps to increasing women’s access and participation in civic society.

Partaking in civil activities may provide the welcome means to step out of a patriarchal environment that mostly condemns them to the household. For both genders, however, it should be of value to civic engage civically, even though it does not monetize itself immediately but may so further down the road when acquired skills and knowledge empower the young men and women to participate better on the labour market and political arena.

### *Good practices*

#### Anti-Corruption Network, Thailand:

The anti-corruption group, created in 2012, is comprising of 4,000 Thai university students from more than 90 universities, and has been recognized by the World Economic Forum as a “Creative For Good”.<sup>89</sup> Sponsored by UNDP, anti-corruption events have been held across the country to educate student leaders about the dangers of corruption in Thai society and

<sup>88</sup> Innovations in Civic Participation (2010) ‘Youth Development through Civic Engagement: Mapping Assets in South Asia’.

<sup>89</sup> UNDP (2013) ‘UNDP-sponsored ‘ Thai Youth Anti-Corruption Network’ wins best practice at World Economic Forum’ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/articles/2013/06/17/undp-sponsored-thai-youth-anti-corruption-network-wins-best-practice-by-world-economic-forum.html>

promote responsible civic knowledge. The success of the numbers of participants and their increased awareness of corruption and its negative impacts has continued to attract attention from other institutions and networks, most notably Thailand's private sector Anti-Corruption Network (ACN) which has agreed to sign a partnership to develop a future advocacy campaign and develop the capacity of organizations to strategize on fighting corruption<sup>90</sup>.

To follow the initiative: [www.facebook.com/tyanticorruption](http://www.facebook.com/tyanticorruption)

International Education and Resource Network - Bangladesh (iEARN-BD):

iEarn is a non-profit organization focusing on youth empowerment through education and volunteering with a presence in more than 140 countries worldwide.<sup>91</sup> bEARN or iEARN-BD is the Bangladeshi branch of iEARN who acts as a major force in helping and promoting young people to be involved in volunteer service in their communities. bEARN also provides training opportunities to increase young people capacity, such as project "Generation Change" in 2013 that provided lectures and training on tolerance and peace for young Bangladeshis. Another recent project was "Youth TechCamp Bangladesh," which sought to teach participants how to use social media and other ICTs to design and implement social campaigns.

To follow the organisation: [www.earnbd.org](http://www.earnbd.org)

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<sup>90</sup> World Economic Forum (2013) 'The Thai Youth Anti-Corruption Network (Thailand)' <http://www.weforum.org/best-practices/creative-good/thai-youth-anti-corruption-network-thailand>

<sup>91</sup> iEarn, <http://www.earn.org/about>, accessed: 13 August 2015

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## CHAPTER FIVE

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### *Summary and Recommendations*

This section summarizes the challenges of the three SWAP elements, reviews what has and has not worked and presents recommendations for the future.

Investing in youth and formulating effective and inclusive youth policies not only makes economic sense, it is also a human-rights imperative. If opportunities for investment in young people's intellectual and human potential are missed, this may prove costly to reverse, both for the young citizens and for society as a whole. This is particularly pertinent to many countries in Asia and the Pacific considering the current demographics and the potential of harnessing a "demographic dividend". Moreover, young persons should not only be seen as a resource but also as equal citizens that deserve the same rights, protection and opportunities like all citizens.

A government's response to the needs of young people to enable them to engage in economic and civic society can determine whether a large youth population can have a positive or negative effect on society. Governments can choose to see a growing youth population as a liability or as an opportunity. With the right policies a government can engage the largest generation of young people in human history to nurture their potential to contribute to their society's future sustainable and inclusive development.

### *Employment and entrepreneurship*

This report outlines that the challenges that youth in the ESCAP region face include a lack of decent work, which is typified by high rates of youth unemployment compared to adults, as well as high rates of working poverty. The lack of access to credit is another barrier that youth face, which hampers the opportunity for entrepreneurship, and subsequently disabling an alternative solution to unemployment. Finally, the undergirding issue is that young women are disproportionately affected by such matters.

Policymakers have advocated how labour market policies are essential in the Asia-Pacific region, although they are not being developed fast enough due to infrastructure and institutional constraints. Such policies include public employment services, training schemes and employment subsidies. These policies help create jobs but also contribute to reducing the "catch 22" trap whereby young people do not have a job because they do not have enough experience, and do not have experience because they have never had a job. Pakistan for example made positive steps by implementing such youth employment policies, for instance its previous Government Internship Scheme which not only provided employment and experience for young persons but also engaged them politically.

What also is evident is that, despite existing youth employment policies, they have not translated into addressing the gender disparity, as young girls are still over-proportionately affected by issues of unemployment, working poverty and lack of access to credit.

To improve the prospect of youth employment challenges in the future, a comprehensive approach with focus on both the demand and supply sides of the labour market is needed.<sup>92</sup> Policies in developing countries must focus on raising the quality of work while maintaining levels of growth that are sufficient to fulfil the needs of the growing numbers of new entrants to the labour market each year. Scholars and policymakers are looking towards promoting better labour market outcomes for youth, and new areas of concentration in which ideas are gaining ground are ICT, Green Jobs and agricultural jobs.

In many countries in the ESCAP region, the economy is developing alongside the progress of ICT and internet connectivity. *eWork* can be a viable option for addressing the skills mismatch in the labour market of some countries where there are high rates of employment amongst graduates. *eWork*, which involves online off-shoring of services, is a trend that has begun to create new jobs in countries such as Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan and Thailand.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, *eWork* can encourage employment for young women and persons with disability, where discrimination and lack of opportunities in the physical workplace has limited them.

The need for sustainable development prompted the creation of *green jobs*. Green jobs are meant to respond to two major challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: averting dangerous climate change and reducing environmental degradation while offering decent work. The creation of green jobs is apt to foster a greener economy to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation. Green job examples range from land management, sustainable tourism, renewable energy, organic farming to recycling and many more. To be able to make this transition into a greener economy it is key that young people are offered the suitable training and skills for green jobs.

- Considering the persistent high rates of youth unemployment compared to adult unemployment in the Asia-Pacific region, Governments need to expand job opportunities that are appropriate for young people, especially females, and which would address the skills mismatch. Governments should strategize and create an action plan to develop industries that have the potential for job creation for young people such as ICT related jobs, but also agricultural jobs.
- National youth policy should focus on easing the school-to-work transition by providing training, apprentice and internship schemes in cooperation with the private sector that focus on skills development to better equip young people for the demands of employers. Work experience training should be responsive to labour market requirements and, therefore, include technical and core skills for employability that could be transferred across sectors. Moreover, the job search process can be facilitated by increasing online resources.
- National youth employment policies should make provisions to fund and support youth access to credit along with financial education in order to foster entrepreneurship. Government policy needs to fill the gap of access to credit for youth by offering government micro-financing schemes, or supporting alternative mechanisms and institutions that assist young entrepreneurs with capital to start and grow businesses.
- Gender equality should be a specific feature of youth employment policy with tailored targets and programmes that are carefully planned, budgeted, continually monitored and regularly evaluated by the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. Gender-sensitive

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<sup>92</sup> TWG REPORT

<sup>93</sup> Picard, N. (2014) 'Online Work: The Game- Changer for Asia's Entrepreneurs', *The Asia Foundation*, July 9 2014 <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2014/07/09/online-work-the-game-changer-for-asias-entrepreneurs/>

livelihood and skills training is key to improve young women's employment opportunities. Gender responsive targets and budgeting are needed to ensure equal access to credit and financing to encourage young women entrepreneurs.

### *Political inclusion*

Challenges that youth in the ESCAP region face in regards to political inclusion include: low levels of participation in formal political institutions, the failure of political institutions to win the trust of many young people and finally the recurring theme of gender inequity. Out of the countries reviewed, only Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have clear sections focusing on political inclusion within their youth policy, and amongst those only Bangladesh and the Punjab Youth policy address the gender dimension. The results from the recent elections in Pakistan and India, 2013 and 2014 respectively, has shown a positive increase in youth turnout and can point to the success of youth voter education in promoting political inclusion.

Still, much remains to be done in addressing the issue of trust amongst youth. One of the main findings of the UNDP Asian Barometer Survey is that institutions have failed to win the trust of young people in a number of societies who consequently are in danger of becoming disconnected from conventional political structures and processes.<sup>94</sup> The results of the MyWorld Survey where youth ranked their priorities for the future, within Asian respondents "an honest and responsive government" ranked as the third priority above "protection against crime and violence" and "better job opportunities".<sup>95</sup> An issue that hinders the inclination of youth to participate in political affairs is that the news media can present politics in ways that undermines youth interest in politics.<sup>96</sup> News media can be extremely biased and discourage critical awareness among young people. Thus the challenge is to open up new spaces and establish innovative techniques for the constructive engagement of youth in the formal political process.

The Asian Barometer Survey also demonstrated how Asian youth are not disinterested in politics.<sup>97</sup> The survey revealed many positive indications that show the potential to be harnessed for increased political inclusion. In fact, Asian youth *are* engaging in politics, although less through formal political processes such as political parties and voting. Instead, they are engaging in lobbying or activism as much as older cohorts. Results from the survey also point to how youth are just as committed to democratic government as older cohorts but have higher expectations of the quality of governance than their older cohorts. Therefore, Asian youth's interest in politics and commitment to democracy must be harnessed to foster a relationship of collaboration rather than alienation and mistrust. Good practices have been demonstrated by India in terms of increasing voter education and participation, and Cambodia in terms of opening up channels of communication between government and youth. Their example can be replicated and further built upon by looking at how ICT may offer a new arena to establish a constructive conversation with youth.

A viable option would be political inclusion through use of the Internet and e-government. As youth are increasingly more frequent Internet users, more research is needed on the potential of youth in the Asia-Pacific region to use of Internet for political engagement. There has been

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<sup>94</sup> UNDP (2014) 'Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South East Asia: Exploring political attitudes of East and South East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer Survey'

<sup>95</sup> United Nations (2014) 'We the Peoples: Celebrating 7 Million Voices'

<sup>96</sup> UNDP (2014) 'Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South East Asia: Exploring political attitudes of East and South East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer Survey'

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

much focus amongst scholars on the potential effects of the Internet on the democratic discourse and how the Internet is a platform that can potentially create more opportunities for changing the relationship between citizens and the state through e-government. Research shows that youth in Asia have used ICT and the internet to directly address political and community issues in a response to declining interest in party politics.<sup>98</sup> Less research has been done on how to harness youth's interest in political issues through the use of the internet as a channel of communication between youth and governments.

- In response to trends of lower youth turnout at elections, Governments can follow the example of the Government of India's voter education drive that successfully increased youth turnout. National youth policies should integrate political education and participation into curricula in order to educate and promote youth participation in the political process. Subject on political processes would also help young people correctly understand the principles of politics with international implications.
- Considering the low rates of youth participation in formal institutions, yet evidence of political interest amongst youth, there is a need to bridge the gap between youth's political perspective and formal political institutions. Governments should explore newer platforms and channels for communication effective between government and young people such as Internet and Social Media platforms and e-government.
- There is a continued need for special attention to be paid to young women's political inclusion with tailored targets and programmes that are carefully planned, continually monitored and regularly evaluated. The programmes need to address the barriers to the political inclusion of young women such as making politics relevant to young women and dispelling gender stereotypes and institutional barriers which place men in the public sphere.

### *Civic engagement*

Experience has shown that civic engagement of youth in the ESCAP region is still not reaching its full potential as youth are not being afforded the opportunity to participate in decision-making. The issue is often due to cultural reasons where age hierarchy can prevail over inclusivity of young persons' perspective. All the countries reviewed in this report recognize and state their commitment to youth civic participation in their National Youth Policy. However, encouragement of youth is vague and without concretely budgeting programmes and objectives. Kazakhstan's Youth Policy has little mention of civic participation.

Nonetheless, young persons do show their own personal interest and motivation in civic engagement. What is important is that young people themselves are aware of the benefits of civic engagement in increasing social capital. ICTs, particularly social media, have played a prominent role in young people's civic engagement in recent years. These newer online technologies have been used as global platforms by youth to generate and disseminate knowledge, create unified youth-led social movements.

Technology will allow civic engagement to move beyond just a community level, and beyond formal avenues traditionally available to them. Social networking tools and the Internet allow youth to share ideas and mobilize on particular issues. ICT and social networking must be recognized and encouraged as a burgeoning platform for youth civic engagement.

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<sup>98</sup> Zhang, W. and Lallana, Z. (2013) 'Youth, ICTs, and Civic Engagement in Asia', *The International Communication Gazette*, 75 (3), p. 249-252

- Volunteering is an aspect of civic engagement that builds social capital and benefits both young people and the community through the services provided. National youth policies should promote a volunteer corps with an online volunteer opportunity resource that are government endorsed and officially recognized and as such seen as an asset, especially for employability. Volunteering could be incorporated into the school curriculum and focus on pressing issues such as environmental protection and sustainability. In such a way barriers to volunteerism such as time and financial concerns could be overcome if it was formally recognized.
- In order to change existing hierarchical norms of adults' opinions being respected over young people's because of their perceived inexperience, confidence in youth's competencies must be recognized amongst adults and youths themselves. Therefore, Governments must promote civic education programmes that educate, provide hands-on experience and empower youth to have the confidence to take part in decision-making at local, national and global level.
- An existing barrier to youth civic engagement is the lack of opportunity and platform for youth's voice to be heard and contribute to decision-making. Therefore, Governments should ensure that organizations, governmental and non-governmental create a means or mechanism to involve youth within their own structure for example including youth on committees, commissions or boards. Considering the steady growth in the use of ICTs, there is potential for transforming the Internet into a platform for promoting effective civic engagement for feedback and input relevant to communal and national spheres.

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